Thompson: Thank you so much for being here with us today. I'm really excited and really thankful for this opportunity to have this conversation and be a part of hearing your reflections on your time at Midd, your time leading up to it, athletics and sports, how it has influenced post-undergraduate studies. Without further ado, would you want to give an introduction of who you are, your background a little bit, how you got into sports—football, rugby—everything kind of leading up to Middlebury?

Garcia-Sjogrim: Yeah, sure. So, my name is Humberto Garcia-Sjogrim, and as you can probably gauge from my last name, my father is Cuban and my mother is Swedish. I grew up...I was born in Sweden but moved to Spain before I was one. Lived there until I was about five, then came to the U.S. Miami, Chicago, New York over the course of five years. Back to Spain when I was 10. Lived in Madrid for a year, and then went to...then a few years later, moved to southern France. Boarding school. Sweden to boarding school. Went back to Spain and started college and realized, sort of looked around. Youth unemployment was around 40%. People were graduating with medical degrees, engineering degrees, law degrees and driving a cab, because they couldn't find a job. And having had the opportunity—the privilege, really—of studying abroad, I had colleagues...classmates from boarding school who were now in college. Some in Sweden, some in the U.K., some in the U.S. I thought, "you know what, I don't have to stay here. I can try to go." After my first year of university, I took a year off and studied for the SAT and came to the U.S. and visited many schools. One of them obviously being Middlebury. Loved it! And so I applied.

From a sports perspective, I was in my early teens doing track & field. I got into rugby. I was in boarding school in Southern France, and that's sort of the cradle of rugby in France. And had the great opportunity to play with a local junior team. But from there, I went to Sweden and rugby is a very small sport in Sweden. At the time there were only about 55 teams and a little over 3,000 players wide. It's sort of like the Jamaican bobsled team. I made the junior national team, but it's a very small community. Regardless, it was a whole lot of fun. Really enjoyed it. And then, my father, who again I had mentioned was Cuban. He went to the University of Miami. As a student, he played baseball and football there. And so, he told me. He said, "Humberto, rugby is a small sport in the U.S. Football is a big deal. You've got to play football." And so, when I got to Middlebury, I walked into the coach's office. They had already started practice, because football players had gotten there a couple of weeks early. But I had just walked into Mickey Heinecken's office and I said, "I'd like to play football. I play rugby and I'd like to play football." He looked at me like, "what?" Long story short, I joined the team. I won Rookie of the Year that year. I didn't continue to play, because my second year I basically had to go back home and make money to help pay for school. By the time I was back, it was sort of the third season for my cohort. I started playing with them, but at the time, I was also leading the International Students Organization. I was working part time. I felt like I couldn't do everything, so I dropped football.

But I did play some rugby that year and the following year, my senior year. A little bit. I guess those are the highlights.

Thompson: Wow, that's very cool. It seems like you saw a lot of the world at such an early age.

Garcia-Sjogrim: I was lucky.

Thompson: You mention that you were the president of the International Student Organization. Can you tell me more about what that was like? Having a leadership role, the organization at that time, like that group of students.

Garcia-Sjogrim: You know, it was such a fabulous experience. I really identified with the international students at Middlebury. To over simplify...you could say at the time, at Middlebury—and I'd love your perspective today—you had a lot of students predominantly from the northeast, right. And many from those great schools like Andover and Exeter and others. Not just those schools. And then you have a vibrant international community, roughly 10% of the student population. And then you had students of color, primarily Black students but some Hispanic and Asian obviously. I don't recall the exact percentage, but it was probably 7-10%. And, in a way, those different cohorts sort of stuck to their respective groups. There certainly was crossover, but...I very much gravitated towards the international student community. That's where I saw myself fitting in. One of the beautiful things about sport is that it does have a melting pot. Other than me, I don't think there were any other international students on the football team. But certainly there were student-athletes of color on the football team, who I developed friendships with, and we're still friends today. That was one of the ways of starting to connect outside of my world. From a leadership perspective, I had mentioned that I had started playing rugby in France and then in Sweden. So my high school in Sweden, I started a rugby team because there was no team. And I was the captain, and that had that opportunity to play for the Swedish Junior National Team and do a lot of things in that space. I was also prefect in my home, so I guess I gravitated early towards sort of leadership roles. Once I was at Middlebury, I sort of engaged with the ISO—International Students Organization, at the time—played a role in helping to organize a few events, and eventually had the opportunity to lead the organization. When I say lead, the reality is that it's very much a team effort. Yes, I had the title of President, but others were doing the bulk of the work. I was mostly helping to coordinate and shepherd, pushback, support. Whatever felt right at the time.

Thompson: That's really cool. I'd say that I'd agree that a lot of times...it's easy for anyone to stick with a cohort of people [they] kind of find themselves in initially. It's easy to stick with that. You mentioned that rugby wasn't the largest, it's not a really big thing in comparison to football—American football—here. What was the rugby team like? How did that contribute to your Midd experience?

Garcia-Sjogrim: It's funny. The rugby team, at the time—hopefully this is not so true today—had a pretty bad reputation. The joke around campus was that our drinking team had a rugby problem. So, that gives you a sense of what was going on.

You know, having grown up in Spain where the drinking age is 16, the first time I ever got drunk, I was 15-years-old. I was at a restaurant with my parents having lunch. I asked for a second coke and my dad said, "No. Have some sangria." After half a glass of sangria, walking down the beach, I realized...I thought it was really funny how the waves were splashing my feet. In hindsight, I was a little bit drunk or tipsy. But you know, drinking for me at the time, it was something social with family, with control. Then I went to boarding school, first in France then Sweden, and by that time, I was 18-19. Eventually, I could buy alcohol. None of my peers could, and so people would come and ask me to buy alcohol. But when I saw what was happening at the parties in Sweden, where people were binge drinking, I sort of became disgusted by it. For a few years, I drank very, very little, including at Middlebury. It was just not… with the rugby team, I was very interested in playing when I could, attending some training, but again, I wasn't all into the team and the experience and the parties. In part, because I felt like I didn't have the time. And in part, because drinking wasn't necessarily something I was all that excited about. And I don't in anyway mean to imply that's all they did, but there was a fair amount of drinking going on.

Thompson: That's interesting to hear, just in terms of the different culture around alcohol. The purpose of what people see it as. I would say that despite my very much Midwest upbringing, I would align a lot more in terms of how your family roots viewed it as more of a kind of social thing, not a binging thing. That's definitely something that, I would say, maybe is defining of American college culture. That's a really broad statement. But it's very different.

Garcia-Sjogrim: One interesting thing about when I was at Middlebury, our president at the time, John McCardell, had started a national campaign to try to bring the drinking age back to 18. If you google John McCardell, I think you'll see Wikipedia talks a little bit about this effort that he spearheaded. It's certainly one of those things where something is forbidden, for whatever reason, it's more attractive to people, right. I guess, I [will] drink beer and wine and will have a margarita now and again. There's nothing wrong with a drink. You have to find ways, particularly with young people whose brains are still developing, make sure they drink responsibility.

Thompson: In addition to that, I'm curious to know your perspective of the general campus environment. During your time there, it seems like—and from a couple other interviews I've had, they've talked about real world events, domestic and global, [that] had an impact on campus. I know Apartheid was kind of towards the end in the early 90's. At least in the late 80's, early 90's it had an impact on campus. You also entered college during an American election

year with Clinton vs. George H.W. Bush. It seems like there were a lot of different things that could be on campus. What-- how did that impact your perspective about Middlebury campus, about culture at Midd?

Garcia-Sjogrim: It's interesting. On the geopolitical front, I was a lot less focused on what was happening in the U.S. and more interesting broader issues. Interestingly enough, Apartheid for whatever reason wasn't in my cohort's radar, per se. But we did organize a symposium the year that I was leading the ISO. I remember-- I'm forgetting the theme. I hope it comes back to me. Many of the speakers, like a professor [and] an author wrote a book *Rivers of Eden*, about conflict in the Middle East and how water was at the basis of conflict. There was former Premier of Quebec that had promised, had talked about succeeding from Canada. There was a Native American Indian, who had a row related to the United Nations and the Native Americans. I think the conference may have, the theme may have been "Jihad vs Mac world" and sort of this notion of separation versus all trying to conform to certain identities and ideals. We were looking at different aspects of how groups struggle with that identity and polarization versus coming together to conform. I would say to the degree that I was focused on geopolitics or politics at all, it was really in that context or in one of my classes. From a moral, student engagement perspective, I was so busy between school, part time work, athletics, student organization involvement, or enjoying and having fun, that there wasn't time for much else.

Thompson: That totally makes sense. That is a classic Middlebury schedule. Maybe that's one of the timeless characteristics of Midd, being involved in a lot of different things. Finding that balancing act in all of it.

I do want to bring attention to the fact that I found that your incoming year, your freshman year...which was '92 I believe. At that time, was the highest percentage for students of color enrollment. The Director of Admissions is quoted saying it was 15.2%, which they broadly state "students of color" that matriculated into Midd. The article, the op-ed really, focused on students who identified as Black or African American, but in general, what was-- I'm bringing it more in terms of racial diversity, but it seems like there was a lot of identity that is being more welcomed into the broader discussion. What was-- did you feel that increase? Obviously it was your first year. Did you feel that sense of vibrancy?

Garcia-Sjogrim: Yes! I did. One of the tensions I remember at the time was specifically related to our Black students on campus and this conversation about sort of, not just how do we fit in, but also how are we different? How do we take pride in that? But also how do we need support in areas because of that? I remember housing a big deal, because there was a house—I feel like initially on campus and then down on South Street right next to the President's house—was...I want to say ALANA or something like that. Does that ring a bell?

Thompson: PALANA? That's so cool. I didn't realize how-- I just joined it myself, so that's cool to hear.

Garcia-Sjogrim: Remind me what the acronym stands for.

Thompson: Oh my gosh, that is something I might not be able to pull out at the top of my head.

Garcia-Sjogrim: Look it up. I want to make sure that I'm not confusing it with a different student org. In the cobwebs of my mind from 25 years ago, that one rang a bell. There was a specific house that primarily Black students lived in on South Street. I remember conversations on campus at the time about… a little bit of that tension. As I mentioned earlier, I felt like we had several distinct groups of students of similar backgrounds that tend to gravitate and do things together. But then, not necessarily mix in a social setting but rather in our classrooms and on our sports teams or certain activities. We had just done away with fraternities, so you had the social houses. You had a certain crowd that was their social scene. And then you had different groups, which in largely I'd assume broke down along racial lines, domestic and international student lines.

Thompson: I would say that sort of breakdown is something that we still see today to different degrees in different settings. Okay, I have it! It's Pan-African, Latino, Asian and Native American. It takes each of the first letters to make PALANA, and we consider it a social house...cultural affinity space. I would say that it's still predominantly a space where—I mean, I don't want to speak on behalf of everyone at Midd—I would say for some of our nonwhite folx at Midd to have a safe space, have a safe social space.

Garcia-Sjogrim: Let me share something in that context, because I went to PALANA a few times..a gathering or event, might be a symposium. When I came to the U.S. I didn't necessarily identify as Latino. In my case, I was sort of [a] mix of Spanish, Cuban, Swedish. In fact, I didn't really identify as Latino until twenty years after graduating, and it is because of a specific role I had. I work at Coca-Cola, and at the time, I was working with the Latin Affairs group. If you think about it, it's government affairs and community affairs focused on Hispanic community. And through that role, I started to engage Latino groups across the U.S. and as I met more and more people that led or participated in events related to these groups, what I realized was that it didn't matter if your background is Guatemalan, Mexican, or Hawaiian...Puerto Rican. We all have something in common beyond just the language, obviously, relative to our experience in the U.S. How we are seen. The things-- our culture. The things we gravitate to. The challenge, though, is no one has interviewed the word "Latino" with enough meaning to overcome the differences, right. When we get together, we're typically celebrating our national culture, food, folklore, national holidays...which are different. Some of them coincide with the same date, but we're celebrating different things. Our heritage is varied. It's not just one heritage. At

Middlebury, I never necessarily thought [of] myself a Latino student. even a student of color for that matter. I thought myself an international student. I could *related,* absolutely, to very much international students *and* the students of color. I guess it was something other than white, so I could relate to that. But I didn't necessarily gravitate or become deeply involved in any of the activities.

Thompson: Well, that's actually really interesting. You're making me think in terms of how people are perceived and how people self-identify, and how that doesn't match always. I think that's something that happens a lot maybe at Midd, in terms of having those separate cohorts that we were talking about.

Garcia-Sjogrim: I look at you and I say okay, you have an Asian heritage, right?

Thompson: Yes.

Garcia-Sjogrim: It's easy for me to make some assumptions about your friends, your family, what you like and dislike. That may be true or absolutely *not* true, right. One of the things you'll learn at Middlebury is we're exposed to people from so many different backgrounds. And you'll get to meet people and know what they're really like. One of the wonderful things about Midd, particularly as we then go on into this world, which is so polarized and divisive. I think it's a huge gift to our students.

Thompson: You mentioned a little bit about your time at Coca-Cola. I'd love to know more about how your Midd, how that may have influenced your post-Midd endeavors...if it did have influence in terms of your time Coca-Cola, business school I saw you went on to, entrepreneurial endeavors, as well.

Garcia-Sjogrim: I think Middlebury prepared me well for life after Middlebury. Middlebury, I think, really rather than specializing in one subject, right. The liberal arts are really brought on purpose and helps you learn how to think. I think Middlebury, specifically, we have the ability to become very good communicators. That's something I strongly appreciated in many of the alumni and people I've spoken with or resumes of students I've looked at coming out of Middlebury over the years. So I'd say, most of the influence per se, I'd say prepared me well for life after Midd.

Interesting, as I think about it, one happy coincidence...My wife is a Middlebury alum. She graduated a year after I did. But we never dated at Middlebury. And so, when I graduated in '96, one of the things that was happening was the Olympics in Atlanta. I had never been to Atlanta. A Middlebury alum, Stacy Fallen, who's probably...I don't know '92, '93, '94...was working for the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, otherwise known as ACOG. And she said, "we

need people with language skills. I'm going to put a job posting up at Middlebury." A friend of mine, another member of the International Student Organization, had seen that and was applying. Word was sort of going around with international students. I thought, "oh wow. What a great opportunity." I actually had secured my job sort of coming out of college. I was going to be moving to the west coast, but I was like, "you know what, this is just like for the summer. Let me see if I can do it." And so I applied and I got the job. I never been to Atlanta, didn't know anything about Atlanta. But I knew Lucy, my now wife, was from Atlanta. So I said, "hey Lucy." I think I emailed her, because I think she was studying abroad at the time. "I got this job in Atlanta at the Olympic Village. Any suggestions on where I should live? Who should I talk to? Where can I rent a room?" Lucy wrote back and she said, "well, let me talk to my parents. We have an empty room in our house. Perhaps you can stay there. *But,* can you get me a job at the Olympic Village?" I did. We started dating and so on and so forth. Middlebury has had a lot of broad impact in my life, that being one of them.

I also had three sibling who attended and graduated from Middlebury after I did. And now, sort of going back to your question...you know, every now and then it will come up in a work conversation or recruitment context. It certainly...it's something we carry with us for the rest of our lives. And we are looking to you to help elevate the stature of the college and make our diploma more valuable.

Thompson: Hopefully I'm doing a good job at that.

Garcia-Sjogrim: I'm sure you are.

Thompson: I was really interested in learning a little more about your time specifically with Coca-Cola and philanthropy work a little bit. In 2018—I came across...but I'm blanking on the website—it's talking about your advocacy in terms of expressing solidarity with continuing DACA in 2018, which was a huge thing I'd say. It hits on both domestic and foreign affairs at the same time for the U.S. I would love to hear more about your perspective and thoughts, and what that meant to be a leading advocate in such a large company.

Garcia-Sjogrim: That's a really good question. So, that was at the time when I was in the Latin Affairs Team. Again...government relations, community affairs related to Hispanic communities. And I had the opportunity through that work to engage with people who were working on this issue specifically and learn a little bit more about it. So then I sort of became curious, "I wonder if *we* have any DACA recipients at Coke." And sure, I found a young woman who was working at the company in an entry-level role. Because I was working with our public affairs and government relations folks, talked to people outside of the company, learning what other companies who are very progressive were doing to lobby Congress and the White House in this respect. I felt, gosh this is the right thing to do. If we… a) we've got folks working for us. The

company is certainly I'm sure at our bought roast. And, what's going to happen in DACA is not renewed. Purely from a human perspective. And also, frankly from an economic perspective for the U.S., these people are working, they're paying taxes. Let's not shoot ourselves in the foot here. I thought, I'm going to do what little I can do both demonstrate support for DACA recipients within my realm, whether that's this woman internally who I've worked with and mentored for several years. Or, other DACA recipients in the community. I wanted them to feel supported. And then at the same time, to advocate and lobby within the organization to try to ensure that our leaders were aware of what was going on and why it's important. Why we should lean into it, right. Instead of just saying that we have other things to worry about.

Thompson: That was just something that was really interesting to me to see all of that. I appreciate you sharing a little bit more.

Garcia-Sjogrim: And again, think about the fact until maybe right around that time, a couple years before, I didn't necessarily think of myself as Latino. Not that I wouldn't have identified with a Mexican woman who was an immigrant and DACA recipient or a man from Guatemala in the same shoes, but I wasn't thinking about it sort of holistically the same way that I do now. Now I'm involved. We started something called Latino Victory Georgia, which is a chapter of a national organization—Latino Victory—to identify and support candidates who are running for office. We're trying to do the same thing at a local level: city council, state house. Now, if we're going back to Middlebury today, I'd probably spend more time at PALANA. And more time engaged with students of color. Now I can relate much more so than when I was coming from Europe and really identifying more as someone who Swedish or Spanish, French. Than someone who had grown up in the U.S.

Thompson: We'll have to have you come back then, if you haven't already had the chance make your way back to rural Vermont.

Garcia-Sjogrim: I've been back a few times. I always enjoy coming back.

Thompson: Good. Wrapping up a little bit and thinking more towards Middlebury and the future, what would you want to see from Middlebury in terms of students, the general campus community. I typically think about it in a four year increment, thinking that that's the time a student typically matriculates through their college experience. At least here at Midd. There's always exceptions that people can go faster or have more time at Midd, but around that time. What would you say you'd want to see?

Garcia-Sjogrim: I think the first question that comes to mind is, what do we mean by Middlebury? Middlebury today, thanks to… we've always had Bread loaf and the international schools, but now you also have the Middlebury in Monterey or the Institute...Middlebury

Institute in California. I think of it more of a network than a place. Now, the campus from my perspective is very much the heart and soul. And surely a very special place for me. But, as I think of Middlebury ten, fifteen, thirty years from now, it's more sort of the idea of Middlebury, and how through this network we can continue to shape future leaders and expose them to different ideas, different challenges, different cultures. Connecting to each other, connecting to the world. I'm very bullish on Middlebury's future. You know, this is a time education is changing so much, and small colleges in particular, in many cases, are having a hard time attracting students. And there's this whole shift of online learning and do you need to be in a physical place. I certainly believe and hope that certain colleges, Middlebury being one of them, will continue to thrive. While others may shut down or merge with other schools, we not only have a great heritage, we thankfully have a very good track record. I think that applies to the current leadership as well, with President Patton and her team are doing. Again, I don't have a crystal ball, but I'm excited about how, you know, Middlebury will continue to lean into shaping those future leaders, like yourself.

Thompson: Well, thank you. I fully agree. I see a really bright future and just seeing Middlebury thrive in the future. Well, thank you so much for your time today. I have really appreciated this conversation and learning from you in terms of this project, but also just personally. Amazing insight to listen to, so I appreciate it a lot.

Garcia-Sjogrim: Thank you Ellie, and thank you for doing this. It's so important and what a great insight to know that we hadn't captured this sliver, if you will, of our history. I certainly, *now,* identify as a student-athlete of color or alumni of color. Didn't necessarily that way in the past...while I was there. But I'm thrilled to know that we're doing this work and research.